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Chairman: Mr. Maertens (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Belgium)

Contents

Agenda item 114: Programme of activities of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People

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In the absence of Mr.Belinga-Eboutou (Cameroon), Mr. Maertens (Belgium), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 114: Programme of activities of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People (A/58/289 and A/C.3/58/2)

1. **Mr. Ndiaye** (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)), introducing the item, summarized the report of the Secretary-General on the programme of activities of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People (A/58/289) and invited States to contribute to the United Nations Trust Fund for the International Decade and the Voluntary Fund for the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, set up in 2002. As the Decade drew to a close, he hoped that a special effort would be made to realize its aims, including the adoption of the draft declaration on the rights of indigenous people by the end of 2004.

2. **Mr. Schölvinck** (Department of Economic and Social Affairs) said that it had been an honour for the Department to welcome the Permanent Forum and its secretariat earlier that year. Although indigenous issues dated back to the 1950s in the work of the International Labour Organization and to the 1970s in the United Nations human rights system, they were now an emerging priority for the Organization. Owing to the long-standing institutional human rights agenda, the International Year of the World's Indigenous People had been declared in 1993 and the International Decade and the establishment of the Permanent Forum had been promoted in Vienna that same year. Indigenous concerns now extended to other social and economic areas.

3. Some 370 million indigenous people, spread across all continents, interfaced with the world on a daily basis, while preserving their cultures and identities, grounded in a common past and aspiring to a common future. Indigenous people were among the world's poorest and most marginalized. They were poorly educated and unemployed — with the huge health risks those disadvantages entailed — and suffered all the ills attendant on internal conflict. Comprising the majority in many countries or within their traditional territories, they clamoured for political and economic participation and claimed collective land rights and a more equitable distribution of resources, in their quest to overcome the legacies of colonialism and conquest.

4. The year 2000 had been a turning point for indigenous issues with the establishment of the Permanent Forum, which, together with the adoption of the draft declaration, was one of the Decade's main goals. The Forum's position as a subsidiary body of the Economic and Social Council, and the breadth of its mandate, covering all social matters, attested to the growing profile of indigenous issues. Its key roles included providing advice to the Council on the mainstreaming and coordination of those issues in the United Nations system, and awareness-raising and data production. Its uniqueness in the United Nations system lay in its mixed composition, half of its 16 experts having been nominated by States, and half by indigenous organizations.

5. The Permanent Forum and the Programme of Action for the Decade, including its partnership theme, reflected Member States' core intention to end the marginalization of indigenous issues through active indigenous participation, a spirit echoed in the recommendations of the Forum's first and second sessions. United Nations agencies, funds and programmes had had increasing contact with the Permanent Forum, especially during the second session, in which 23 intergovernmental agencies had participated. Indeed, the vast majority of the recommendations of both sessions were addressed to the United Nations system, and a constantly growing Inter-agency Support Group for the Forum had been established in 2002.

6. Mainstreaming, which involved changing public policies and resource allocation, was no easy task. Since international and national public officials must gain a profound understanding of the issue being mainstreamed the strategy for integrating indigenous issues in intergovernmental and, eventually, governmental public policies must be multi-pronged. The United Nations long-standing interaction with the indigenous movement placed it in the forefront of efforts to reverse historic injustice. Integration of indigenous issues into the Millennium Development Goals was crucial, since some countries with large indigenous communities could achieve some of those goals, especially those relating to education and halving extreme poverty, by focusing their policies on those communities. The challenge was to realize the full potential of the welcome extended to indigenous

peoples, by the Secretary-General at the first session of the Permanent Forum.

7. **Mr. Simancas Gutiérrez** (Mexico) said his delegation welcomed the establishment of the Permanent Forum and the coordination achieved between the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. However, with some issues still pending, he would like their coordination among the Secretariat units to be reflected in the 2004 report of the Secretary-General.

8. **Ms. Maillé** (Canada) expressed her satisfaction with the work accomplished on the Permanent Forum and the increased collaboration on indigenous issues between the Office of the High Commissioner and the Department. She hoped that further initiatives would be taken under the Indigenous Fellowship Programme and wondered what was being done in that regard.

9. **Mr. Ndiaye** (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)) said that cooperation between the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Office of the High Commissioner was very close. The secretariat of the Permanent Forum was an extension of the OHCHR New York Office, which boded well for further cooperation between them. He agreed with the proposal that such cooperation should be reflected in the 2004 report of the Secretary-General.

10. **Mr. Schölvinck** (Department of Economic and Social Affairs) said that, in addition to that excellent cooperation, there were other coordination mechanisms, such as the Inter-agency Support Group, which met regularly. Perhaps that coordination could be better reflected in future reports. The latest Indigenous Fellowship Programme was being set up, in which connection Member States would be requested to contribute to the two Voluntary Funds.

11. **Ms. Rasi** (Finland), speaking on behalf of the Nordic countries, said that the overall objective of the Decade to strengthen international cooperation in order to improve the lives of the indigenous peoples was as valid today as when it had been established in 1993. As it drew to its end, the Nordic countries firmly believed that the Decade had considerably improved protection and promotion of indigenous people's rights and interests, and hoped that dialogue and cooperation towards achieving the as yet unattained goals would be pursued.

12. The greatest achievement, the establishment of the Permanent Forum, had been one of the Decade's main aims, and after its first two sessions, was already energizing the United Nations system and demonstrating its potential to contribute to the attainment of the other Decade goals and its interactive role as opinion-gatherer, as well as a catalyst and adviser for different agencies. The Nordic countries welcomed the attention the Forum had devoted to developing its working methods, especially to its cooperation with the various bodies of the United Nations system and the high degree of interest shown by United Nations agencies and the World Bank.

13. Also pertinent were the Forum's priority themes for its second and third sessions: the high-level discussion on indigenous children had touched on its six mandated areas and highlighted their synergetic relationship. The Nordic countries looked forward to a similar approach at the Forum's 2004 discussion on indigenous women, another priority theme. The Nordic countries commended the able and efficient leadership of the Chairman of the Forum as well as its secretariat, which, short of both staff and time, had worked tirelessly to prepare the second session of the Forum and hoped that it would soon be provided with the human and financial resources that it clearly deserved, which should come from the regular United Nations budget. Her delegation also commended the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people for his important contribution.

14. The past decade had resulted in a growing understanding of the obstacles faced by indigenous peoples in preserving their culture, livelihood and communities, while improving their living conditions. The outcome of the Johannesburg Summit was the most recent sign of the increasing emphasis given to the rights, role and contribution of indigenous peoples to international forums, and her delegation hoped for similar recognition at the forthcoming World Summit on the Information Society. The Nordic countries emphasized the need for concrete results in completing the draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples and urged all delegations to redouble their efforts to reach consensus. They looked forward to the review of both the Decade and the activities of the United Nations system on indigenous issues in general.

15. **Mr. Balarezo** (Peru), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group, said that a great deal of progress had been

made in the past two years for indigenous peoples, including the appointment of the Special Rapporteur. Training programmes, workshops, seminars and the Indigenous Fellowship Programme were other major achievements of the Decade thus far.

16. Undoubtedly, the greatest achievement of the Decade had been the establishment of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. Its May 2002 session had given indigenous populations the first opportunity to make their voices heard in the United Nations. However, much work remained, and the Rio Group therefore encouraged the Working Group of the Commission on Human Rights to finish the draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples before the end of the Decade. The Rio Group welcomed the recommendation by the Economic and Social Council that a second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People should be observed and would participate actively in the evaluation of the outcome of the first Decade.

17. **Mr. Leslie** (Belize), speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), expressed gratitude to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for continuing to promote inter-agency cooperation within the framework of the Decade and also welcomed the recommendation to proclaim a second Decade. The Community acknowledged those countries which had supported the Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations and encouraged them to contribute to the Trust Fund for the Decade. As education was a critical component in the promotion and protection of the human rights of indigenous populations, CARICOM also commended the Indigenous Fellowship Programme as a means of strengthening the human and institutional capacities of indigenous people for active participation in the decision-making process. It welcomed the establishment of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and noted with satisfaction its historic role as an equal participant in deliberations.

18. CARICOM member countries were aware that indigenous peoples were their first inhabitants; their traditions and understanding of the harmony between man and the environment had taught a better appreciation of the gifts of nature. Indigenous populations were small and concentrated in only a few countries of the region; accordingly, they were among the most vulnerable populations, and their ability to benefit from development must be ensured. After reviewing recent progress in Belize, Guyana and Dominica, he reiterated the commitment of CARICOM members to integrate indigenous peoples into the development agenda. Politically correct statements, however, would not improve the lives of indigenous peoples unless they were translated into action. They had made tremendous contributions towards national development, and their quality of life must be protected and improved.

19. **Mr. Duque Estrada Meyer** (Brazil) said that the establishment of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues was a landmark in achieving the objectives of the Decade. It allowed members to make contributions towards addressing the challenges facing indigenous peoples, which included lack of access to health care and education, persistent poverty, exclusion and discrimination. His delegation was actively involved in the drafting of the long-awaited declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples, which must be universally acceptable and politically realistic. Creative solutions were needed in some key areas so that the drafting could be completed by the end of the Decade, however, and he called for flexibility on the part of all participants.

20. Brazil benefited from a confluence of cultures, races and traditions and attached the utmost importance to diversity, tolerance and respect. Its Constitution recognized indigenous peoples' social organization, customs, languages, creeds and traditions, as well as their rights over their traditional lands. More than 11 per cent of its national territory — roughly 1 million square kilometres — was reserved for the permanent use of indigenous peoples. Indigenous representatives participated in policy-making at all levels: design, implementation, review and appraisal. The Decade must be more than symbolic; it must contribute to a new era of sustainable development and full respect for the rights of indigenous peoples.

21. **Archbishop Migliore** (Observer for the Holy See) said that the right to development was inherent in every person and that the world's 370 million indigenous people had the same claim to development as all the rest. For development to be truly human, it should be integral: economic and social, political and cultural, moral and spiritual, individual and collective. Indigenous people themselves must be the architects of their own development. The Holy See welcomed the integration of the concerns of indigenous peoples into the objectives of the United Nations system, especially

in education, which was the key to full participation in world progress, and welcomed the establishment of the Trust Fund through the Permanent Forum.

22. Work on developing of international standards concerning the rights of indigenous people was going forward, but national policies had equal significance. Through legislation, countries could do much to preserve and promote their indigenous heritage and protect rights to natural resources. Every initiative which concerned indigenous people should be guided by two principles. First, criteria that were alien or unacceptable to the identity of those concerned should not be applied; and second, the indigenous people themselves should be involved in all stages of projects, from feasibility studies to implementation, evaluation and readjustment. Finally, his delegation welcomed the recommendation of the Forum to advocate for women and children. The more women were free to share their gifts and to assume leadership roles, the better the prospects for the entire human family.

The meeting rose at 11.20 a.m.